

Roll Call, November 30, 2006

The 110th Congress will face a number of national security issues, none more dangerous over the next two years than the rise of narcoterrorism in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Narcoterrorism – terrorism fueled by the sale of illegal narcotics – appeared long ago in our Western hemisphere. Back in the 1980s, Colombian cartels and insurgent groups began attacking their government using billions of dollars in cocaine money. Initially, insurgent groups rented their forces to drug cartels for protection and logistics. Later, they went into the drug business themselves. With access to billions of dollars in drug profits, narcoterrorists often arm their fighters with equipment that is better than the local government's or even the U.S. military.

The rise of narcoterrorism in the Middle East and Central Asia is new. With the expansion of poppy cultivation and opium/heroin production in Afghanistan, the Taleban and Al Qaeda are funding their comeback, backed by the largest poppy crop in history. Afghanistan's President Karzai warned, "Either Afghanistan destroys opium or opium will destroy Afghanistan." The UN Office of Drugs and Crime commented, "we are dangerously close to the second option."

Profits from the sale of opium are restoring strength to the Taleban and its allies in Pakistan. In 2002, Pakistan's President Musharraf deployed his army along the lawless Afghan border. The Pakistani army fought a number of battles with the Taleban who actually grew in strength during the conflict. Funded by the booming opium trade, Taleban, Al Qaeda and Uzbek terrorists fought the Pakistani army to a draw. This summer, the Pakistani government changed course and dramatically curtailed the use of its army along the frontier. It was a strategic victory for Al Qaeda and the Taleban. From their new safe haven in Pakistan, terrorists will be able to increase their attacks against the Afghan government and NATO forces deployed in Afghanistan.

The danger posed by narcoterrorism is growing here in America. Recently, Mullah Omar's top financier, Afghan drug lord Haji Basir Noorzai, was arrested in New York attempting to sell \$50 million worth of Afghan heroin in the U.S. Afghan heroin sales in the U.S. are still rising. Unless this trend is stopped, Central Asian drug lords with ties to Al Qaeda will not only increase their profits but will also develop logistical links in the U.S. that could be exploited to do harm America far beyond importing heroin.

Narcoterrorist are already causing great harm to America. The heroin they offer poses a new risk. Traditionally, heroin sold in the United States was only 30% pure and had to be injected to produce a high. Many American kids will not use needles and resisted even trying the drug. With the supply of heroin going up so fast, the new Afghan heroin sold in the U.S. is 100% pure and can be snorted. Kids are now much more likely to try a drug that does not require needles. Statistics show that emergency room visits for heroin overdoses are up over 400% in many suburban hospitals. The Dutch government reports that despite their best efforts at drug

treatment and counseling, over half of kids in that country who tried heroin remain hooked the rest of their lives. The government there is building retirement homes for addicts hooked in the 1960s. The lesson they learned regarding heroin is that, “prevention is worth 10,000 pounds of cure.”

The U.S. military has been understandably reluctant to expand its mission in Afghanistan to take on the drug trade. The United Nations reports that over half the Afghan economy is linked to opium, with poppies now growing in nearly all of Afghanistan’s provinces. NATO militaries are also reluctant to expand their mission. The Canadian army, one of the few NATO contingents to deploy in southern Afghanistan where the drug lords are strong, has lost over 30 soldiers in the fight against the Taleban just this year. The German government refuses to commit its troops to this part of Afghanistan and many other NATO Afghan contingents limit their forces to construction or humanitarian work only.

This is where the Congress has a role. Many Democrats and Republicans clearly see the danger posed by drug profits fueling terrorism. Two years ago, Reps. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ) and Nita Lowy (D-NY) joined to dramatically boost funding above the President’s request for the Afghan police and army to take on this battle. They were backed by Reps. Jerry Lewis (R-CA) and David Obey (D-WI) who ensured that Congress funded a huge expansion in an Afghan helicopter force to support Afghan police and the DEA. The House also backed my amendments bringing the DEA back into the U.S. intelligence community and adding assets to their Afghan operations. The Senate also backed Sen. Schumer’s (D-NY) amendment adding funding for DoD operations against the Central Asian drug trade.

Due to congressional leadership, the Afghan government, DoD and NATO will have more tools available this spring to meet the growing threat. Due to the vast profits available to terrorists and drug lords, we should understand we have only made a start. New reports indicate that other terrorist groups, like Hezbollah, control the drug trade in their regions to generate funding for their operations. As we tighten UN and Treasury controls on terrorist financing, many terrorist groups are now turning to the drug trade to finance their operations. To win this fight, Congress and the President must recognize the new links between drugs and terror and ensure DoD, DEA and our allies have the tools to meet the 21st century narcoterrorist threat.

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